

Villanova, PA – Accompanied by a panel of experts on flood prevention and watershed management, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) described his plan for a regional comprehensive watershed management solution at his Emergency Preparedness and Watershed Management Summit. The Congressman discussed the approval through the House Appropriations Committee of \$250,000 for the beginning of a District-wide watershed management project. This funding would finance the first step of a process to enhance watershed infrastructure, including work on culverts and sewers, as well as environmental restoration of Pennsylvania creeks, in the Seventh Congressional District (Delaware County and portions of Chester and Montgomery Counties). Watersheds involved in the project include Perkiomen Creek, Brandywine Creek and Valley Creek, Ridley Creek, Darby Creek, Chester Creek, Crum Creek, and the Schuylkill River. — “The extensive flooding in this region caused by storms in recent years has shown that informing residents about flood preparedness and repairing our watersheds are top priorities,” said Congressman Sestak. “We need a comprehensive solution to this problem and this was an important event to strengthen relationships between the government and local organizations.”

The Congressman brought together federal, state, county and local officials to address this issue and to discuss steps to prevent flooding as well as to deal with flooding that does occur. Expert panelists included FEMA representative Eugene Gruber, who is responsible for overseeing the three major components of the Mitigation Division – Risk Analysis, Floodplain Management and Insurance, and Hazard Mitigation Assistance. Two panels, one on watershed management and another on flood preparedness, were each followed by a question and answer session.

Since taking office, the Congressman has made a concerted effort to gather information on this issue, meeting with a variety of groups. He has spoken with a watershed specialist for the Delaware County Conservation District about existing plans, an expert in flood plain mapping from Temple University regarding the problems caused by outdated mapping of the region's watersheds, and numerous individual watershed organizations. In addition, the Congressman held a joint meeting with many local watershed groups and the Army Corps of Engineers to review the Corps' proposal for a comprehensive approach for a district-wide watershed management plan.

The Congressman has strongly advocated a comprehensive solution to solve the many problems facing area watersheds, including the extensive flooding that this area has experienced from storms in recent years and pollution of local waterways, not only from companies that dump contaminants, but also from indirect runoff of pollutants such as oil from streets, and fertilizer and herbicides from lawns. This comprehensive plan involves the environmental restoration of the region's waterways while addressing other systems such as culverts and sewer systems.

Congressman Sestak has worked to fund the necessary first step in this process, the Reconnaissance Study, which would use existing information to identify the problems, needs and opportunities regarding water resources in the study area. This step would be followed by a detailed data collection an evaluation and formulation of several alternative plans, and a report making specific recommendations to Congress.

“We cannot fix the flooding problems in our region solely with band-aid solutions that each only deals with concerns of a small community,” said Congressman Sestak. “Repairs made in one part of our region do not necessarily take into account the impact on other communities and watersheds. The long-term approach that begins with a reconnaissance study and involves the many local watershed groups that are knowledgeable about this issue is the only effective way to proceed.”

Watershed management is one of the many environmental issues that the Congressman has worked on during his first term. For his legislative record, PennEnvironment presented him with a perfect scorecard and the League of Conservation gave him a mark of 100 percent.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.